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The Babalon Working 1946: L. Ron Hubbard, John Whiteside Parsons, and the Practice of Enochian Magic

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Abstract

In the spring of 1946 L. Ron Hubbard and John W. Parsons performed a series of magical rituals with the aim of incarnating the Thelemic goddess Babalon in a human being. Hubbard's cooperation with Parsons, known as the Babalon Working, remains one of the most controversial events in Hubbard's pre-Scientology days. This article sets out to describe the content of the magical rituals, as well as their purpose. It is argued that in order to fully understand these events, it is necessary to approach the Babalon Working from the study of Western esotericism in general, and the study of Enochian magic in particular.

Keywords

L. Ron Hubbard – Scientology – Church of Scientology – John W. Parsons – Thelema – Aleister Crowley – Ordo Templi Orientis – magic – Enochian magic – Western esotericism

In 1946, four years prior to the publication of L. Ron Hubbard's seminal work *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* (1950), Hubbard participated in a series of events that remain controversial for the Church of Scientology (CoS) even to this day.[1] During that spring, Hubbard performed a number of

1 I am greatly indebted to Susan Pile and William Breeze who have shared their research on Jack Parsons and L. Ron Hubbard.

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magical rites together with John Whiteside (Jack) Parsons (1914–1952) that subsequently became known as the Babalon Working.[2] Jack Parsons, a pioneer rocket scientist and co-founder of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), was the head of Agape Lodge of Ordo Templi Orientis, a secret society that since the early 1920s was under the leadership of the British occultist Aleister Crowley (1875–1947).[3] Hubbard's association with Crowleyan magic has been known to the public since 1969, when *The Sunday Times* (London) published a detailed exposé of Hubbard's dealings with Parsons entitled "The Odd Beginning of Ron Hubbard's Career." Written by Alexander Mitchell, the article quoted from unpublished letters and a typescript copy of Parsons' record of the events owned by "a former admirer of Crowley," who could have been none other than the Crowley collector and former disciple Gerald Yorke (1901–1983), whose collection of Crowleyana today resides at the Warburg Institute, University of London. The 1969 article describes how Parsons sought to incarnate the Thelemic goddess of female sexuality, Babalon, into a human being:

> But to carry out this intricate mission Parsons needed a female sexual partner to create his child in the astral (spiritual) world. If this part of the fixture [sic] went successfully Parsons would be able to call down the spiritual baby and direct it to a human womb. When born, this child would incarnate the forces of Babalon. During his magical preparations for this incarnation Parsons found himself overwhelmed with assistance from a young novitiate named Ron Hubbard. (Mitchell 1969)

The article was clearly biased against Hubbard, and it mentioned that Crowley himself was suspicious of Hubbard and dismissed him as a confidence trickster. Moreover, the mere fact that Hubbard had been practicing magic with one of Crowley's chief disciples — and that there is therefore a connection between Crowley's magic and Hubbard's religious ideas — would have been embarrassing for the Church of Scientology in 1969. It is therefore not surprising that the CoS forced *The Sunday Times* to pay a settlement for suggesting that there is such a connection. But as Hugh B. Urban has pointed out, what *is* surprising is that the CoS did not deny that Hubbard had practiced magic with Parsons, but on the contrary admitted that "*all of this really did happen*" (Urban 2012:344). The 28 December 1969 issue of *The Sunday Times* included a statement from the CoS in which it was claimed that the "Order of Templars Orientalis" [sic]

2 On Parsons, see Carter 2004, Pendle 2005, and Campion 2015. For two collections of Parsons' esoteric writings, see Parsons 1989, 2008.

3 For a scholarly collection on Crowley and Western esotericism, see Bogdan and Starr 2012.

practiced "savage and bestial rites" and that Hubbard had been "sent in to handle the situation" at the headquarters of the American branch of the organization at 1003 Orange Grove Avenue, Pasadena, California: "Hubbard's mission was successful far beyond anyone's expectations. The house was torn down. Hubbard rescued a girl they were using. The black magic group was dispersed and destroyed and has never recovered" (Church of Scientology 1969). The "girl" was Parsons' former girlfriend and sister-in-law, Sara "Betty" Northrup, who went on to marry Hubbard on 10 August 1946.

While there has been a lot of speculation about the impact of Crowley's magic on Hubbard's Scientology (particularly by critics of Scientology), as a quick Internet search will show, remarkably little scholarly attention has been devoted to Hubbard's involvement with Parsons (Urban 2012: 344).[4] The one exception to this is Hugh B. Urban, who has discussed the issue at some length (2011: 39–42; 2012). According to Urban, Hubbard's brief encounter with Parsons and Crowleyan magic had a significant impact on early Scientology beliefs and practices, despite the CoS's claim to the contrary. That is not to say, however, that Urban argues that Crowley is the main inspiration to Hubbard's system, but rather that Crowley was one of many sources that Hubbard used when he created his bricolage, Scientology. The aim of this article is not, however, to discuss the possible influence of Crowley on Scientology. My scope is more limited and I will instead focus on the Babalon Working as such. What did Hubbard and Parsons *actually do* in the spring of 1946? And, perhaps more importantly, *why* did they do what they did, and what did it *mean*?

The Thelemic Movement in California

The Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO) was founded before World War I in Germany by a group of Freemasons who shared an interest in Theosophy, Occultism, and Rosicrucianism.[5] The leader of this group, Theodor Reuss (1855–1923), envisioned the OTO as a sort of masonic academy that would unite a wide range of masonic high-degree systems into one order. Reuss claimed that the true secret of Freemasonry had been lost, but that it would be restored through the formation of the OTO, which possessed the "key" to Freemasonry, namely,

4 The cooperation between Hubbard and Parsons has been discussed in most Crowley biographies since the publication of John Symonds' *The Great Beast* (1971: 391–395). See also King 1977: 164–167; Symonds 1997: 570–572; Booth 2000: 477–478; Sutin 2000: 412–414; Kaczynski 2010: 537–539.

5 On the history of the OTO, see Kaczynski 2012 and Giudice 2015.

sexual magic. The open claim to possess the secrets of sexual magic, in combination with the fact that the OTO admitted both men and women, set it apart from other forms of Freemasonry, including those of a more esoteric bent. In 1912, Aleister Crowley — who was already established as an esoteric teacher and leader of an occult organization, the A.∴A.∴ — was appointed by Reuss as the head of the British section of the OTO. The teachings of sexual magic were congenial with Crowley's own occult/religious system of Thelema, of which he saw himself as the prophet. According to Crowley, a holy text called *The Book of the Law* had been dictated to him by a supernatural being or "preterhuman intelligence" on a visit to Cairo in 1904. *The Book of the Law* states that humankind is entering a new age, the Aeon of Horus, which is characterized by the individual's absolute freedom: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law." Crowley interpreted this verse from *The Book of the Law* as an injunction to discover one's essence or "True Will" and to act in accordance with it. It was through Western magic (or Magick, as he preferred to spell it) and Eastern mysticism that one would be able to discover the True Will. The most efficient way in which one could learn the practical and theoretical aspects of these two complementary paths was by joining the A.∴A.∴ or Order of the Silver Star, which Crowley had co-founded in 1907. After Crowley had been appointed the head of the English-speaking branch of the OTO (he would eventually assume worldwide leadership of the organization), this order became Crowley's chief organization for promulgating the Law of Thelema.

By the 1940s there was only one functioning OTO lodge under Crowley's leadership, the Agape Lodge in California. Jack Parsons entered the Thelemic milieu in California towards the end of 1940, and quickly attracted the attention of the older members. Jane Wolfe, a silent film actress who had spent time with Crowley at his Abbey of Thelema in Cefalù, Sicily, during the early 1920s, remarked in her diary on 1 December 1940:

> Unknown to me, John Whiteside Parsons, a newcomer, began astral travels. This knowledge decided Regina [Kahl] to undertake similar work. All of which I learned after making my own decision. So the time must be propitious. Incidentally, I take Jack Parsons to be the child who "shall behold them all" (the mysteries hidden therein. [Liber AL [vel Legis,] [Chapter] I, 54–55). 26 years of age, 6'2", vital, potentially bisexual at the very least, University of the State of California and Cal. Tech., now engaged in Cal. Tech. chemical laboratories developing "bigger and better" explosives for Uncle Sam. Travels under sealed orders from the government. Writes poetry — "sensuous only," he says. Lover of music, which he seems to know thoroughly. (Jane Wolfe, Diary typescript)

The reference to the "child who 'shall behold them all' " is to *The Book of the Law*, chapter I, verses 54–55,[6] which, according to Crowley, prophesized the advent of a child who would follow him as his successor and who would understand certain mysteries or secrets of *The Book of the Law* which Crowley himself could not understand. It is quite remarkable that a senior member such as Wolfe would accredit Parsons, a newcomer to the Thelemic circle, with such a role. If nothing else, it is evidence of the fact that Parsons impressed the Californian members of the OTO, and, on 15 February 1941, he was initiated as both a Minerval and a First degree member of the OTO at Winona Avenue in Hollywood. On the same date, his wife, Helen Northrup Parsons, also joined the OTO by taking the Minerval and First degrees as well. They would both take their Second degree together one year later on 15 April 1942. Helen's sister, Sara E. Northrup (future wife of L. Ron Hubbard) also joined the OTO in 1941 and took her second degree in June 1943 (Starr 2003: 366). Parsons became particularly close to the lodge master of Agape Lodge, Wilfred Talbot Smith,[7] who wrote to Crowley about Parsons in March 1941, only a month after Parsons had joined the OTO:

> . . . I think I have at long last a really excellent man, John Parsons. And starting next Tuesday he begins a course of talks with a view to enlarging our scope. He has an excellent mind and much better intellect than myself — O yes, I know it would not necessarily have to be very good to be better than mine . . . J. P. is going to be valuable. (W. T. Smith to Aleister Crowley, 21 March 1941)

By March 1942 Parsons' devotion to Smith was obvious to the other members of the lodge, and some members were even considering Parsons to succeed Smith as lodge master, as seen in a letter from Jane Wolfe to Aleister Crowley:

> Incidentally, I believe Jack Parsons — who is devoted to Wilfred — to be the coming leader, with Wilfred in advisory capacity. I hope you two get together some day, although your present activities in England seem to have postponed the date of your coming to us. Jack, by the way, comes in through some inner experiences, but mostly, perhaps, through the

6 *Liber AL vel Legis* I: 55–56: "The child of thy bowels, he shall behold them. Expect him not from the East, nor from the West; for from no expected house cometh that child. Aum! All words are sacred and all prophets true; save only that they understand a little; solve the first half of the equation, leave the second unattacked. But thou hast all in the clear light, and some, though not all, in the dark."

7 On W. T. Smith, see Starr 2003.

> world of science. That is, he was "sold on *The Book of the Law*" because it foretold Einstein, Heisenberg — whose work is not permitted in Russia — the quantum field folks, whose work is along the "factor infinite and unknown" lines, etc. You two would have a whale of a lot of things to talk over. He and Helen are lock, stock and barrel for the Order. (Jane Wolfe to Aleister Crowley, 9 March 1942)[8]

In June 1942 Parsons moved into 1003 S. Orange Grove on Pasadena's "Millionaires' Row," a large villa that was soon turned into the OTO headquarters. The lodge, however, was marked by inner strife that dated from several years before its relocation to S. Orange Grove, and some members, questioning Smith's motives for serving as lodge master, wrote to Crowley and complained. Crowley tried to make sense of the situation from the boarding house in the English countryside that he was forced to live in due to the air raids on London. The surviving correspondence shows that he was playing some of the members off of one another, especially Smith, from whom he gradually came to distance himself. Matters came to a head when Crowley came up with a Machiavellian scheme to get rid of Smith: Crowley claimed that Smith was the incarnation of an unknown god and that, in order to find out which god he embodied, he had to cut off all contact with the lodge and embark on a spiritual retreat. The lodge members were forbidden to have any contact with their former lodge master. In May 1943, Jack Parsons was appointed the new lodge master as Crowley had come to place his trust in the young rocket scientist, although he was wary of Parsons' inexperience.

> Jack is the Objective (Smith is out, an *affaire classée*: anybody who communicates with him in any way is out also; and that is that, and the best plan is to sponge the whole slate clean, and get to work to build up Thelema on sound principles. And no more brothel-building; let's use marble, not rotten old boards!). Jack's trouble is his weakness, and his romantic side — the poet — is at PRESENT a hindrance. He gets a kick from some magazine trash, or an "occult novel" (if only he knew how they

8 Wolfe had already written to Crowley about Parsons on 20 April 1941: "26 years of age, 6'2" in height, dark hair & eyes, fine looking; passionate & a warrior; boyish, simple, shy, hierarchical in belief but proper sense of equality as a result of his mystic experiences, he says. Born in him, no doubt. And this sense of equality gives him a poise I have found lacking in many places. Not the least pretentious. Altogether most fortunate in his birth and general set-up." Similarly, on 23 June 1941, Wolfe had written to Germer regarding Parsons: "Aristocratic and humble — but with a few democratic threads — an approachable personality, gracious manners, will make him an invaluable man."

> were concocted!) and dashes off in wild pursuit. He MUST learn that the sparkle of champagne is based on sound wine; pumping carbonic acid into urine is not the same thing.
>
> I wish to God I had him for six months — even three, with a hustle — to train in Will, in discipline. He must understand that fine and fiery flashes of Spirit come from the organization of Matter, from the drilling of every function of every bodily organ until it has become so regular as to be automatic, and carried on by itself deep down in the Unconscious. It is the steadiness of one's Heart that enables one to endure the rapture of great passion; one doesn't want the vital functions to be excitable. (Aleister Crowley to Jane Wolfe, December 1943)

Parsons set himself to organize the lodge activities and held weekly classes on various topics, but he still remained loyal to Smith and complained to Crowley about how his former lodge master had been treated. The mistreatment of Smith led Parsons to temporarily resign as lodge master towards the end of the year, although the resignation was never implemented. Crowley continued to put his trust in him, but he was still concerned about Parsons' apparent lack of focus, a concern which he shared with some of the senior members of the lodge: "I am very glad indeed of your offer to cooperate practically in any way possible. I have left Jack Parsons in charge; he is quite all right in essence, but very young and easily swayed by passing influences. I shall look to you to help in keeping him up to the mark" (Aleister Crowley to Ray and Mildred Burlingame, 10 February 1944).

But it was not only Parson's lack of focus that was the cause for concern; he also had an unorthodox approach to magic and used witchcraft and Vodou in his rituals, something which the other members of the lodge avoided. More importantly, Parsons increasingly became interested in the idea of breaching the border between the spiritual and material realms to bring a supernatural entity into the world. The possibility of establishing contact with spiritual beings was accepted by the other members of the lodge as part of the practice of magic, but Crowley cautioned against taking such entities literally: "students are most earnestly warned against attributing objective reality or philosophic validity to any of them" (Crowley 1909, 13), a warning that Parsons appears to have ignored:[9]

9 One possible source of inspiration for Parsons might have been Crowley's short text "De Homunculo Epistola," a secret document on the making of a homunculus intended for members of the Tenth degree of OTO. See King 1973: 233–239.

> There is something strange going on, quite apart from Smith . . . But our own Jack is enamored with Witchcraft, the hounfour, voodoo. From the start he always wanted to evoke something — no matter what, I am inclined to think, as long as he got a result.
>
> According to Meeka [Aldritch] yesterday, he has had a result — an elemental he doesn't know what to do with. From that statement of hers, it must bother him — somewhat at least. (Jane Wolfe to Karl Germer, 1945)

The Babalon Working

L. Ron Hubbard arrived on the scene on 1 August 1945, when he visited the house at 1003 S. Orange Grove Avenue in the company of science fiction illustrator Lou Goldstone. He soon moved into the house and started an affair with Parson's girlfriend and sister-in-law Sara E. Northrup. Parsons continued his magical experiments throughout the fall and winter of 1945 and struck up a close friendship with Hubbard, despite the fact that his girlfriend had abandoned him for Hubbard. Parsons was deeply impressed with Hubbard's experience and natural talent for magic, and he even believed that Hubbard might be in contact with his Holy Guardian Angel, which in Thelemic terminology meant that Hubbard had discovered his True Will or essence. Parsons wrote with excitement about his new magical partner to Crowley in January 1946.

> About 3 months ago I met Capt. L. Ron Hubbard, a writer and explorer of whom I had known for some time. He is a gentleman, red hair, green eyes, honest and intelligent and we have become great friends. He moved in with me about 2 months ago, and although Betty and I are still friendly, she has transferred her sexual affections to him. Although he has no formal training in Magick he has an extraordinary amount of experience and understanding in the field. From some of his experiences I deduce he is in direct touch with some higher intelligence, possibly his Guardian Angel. He is the most Thelemic person I have ever met and is in complete accord with our own principles. He is also interested in establishing the New Aeon, but for cogent reasons I have not introduced him to the Lodge. We are pooling our resources in a partnership which will act as a parent company to control our business ventures. I think I have made a great gain and as Betty and I are the best of friends there is little loss. I cared for her rather deeply but I have no desire to control her emotions, and I can I hope control my own. I need a magical partner. I have many experiments in mind. (John W. Parsons to Aleister Crowley, 26 January 1946)

The magical experiments he alluded to had already commenced on 4 January, when Parsons and Hubbard began a series of invocations of an elemental, something Parsons already had experience doing. Parsons would later call the record of these experiments *The Book of Babalon*. In the introduction to this text he explained that the underlying philosophy for the Babalon Working is that the present age is under the influence of a violent force (which Parsons identified with the god Horus) that would lead to catastrophe. "The catastrophic trend is due to our lack of understanding of our own natures. The hidden lusts, fears, and hatreds resulting from the warping of the love urge, which underlie the natures of all Western peoples, have taken a homicidal and suicidal direction." This force needs to be counterbalanced by another sort of force, called Babalon: "The nature of this force relates to love, understanding, and Dionysian freedom." The invocation of Babalon was thus, according to Parsons, an attempt to prevent the world from being destroyed. The force of Babalon was to be found in each man and woman, but it could also manifest in a specific woman, which was the ultimate goal of Parsons and Hubbard:

> It is indicated that this force is actually incarnate in some living woman, as the result of the described magical operation. A more basic matter, however, is the indication that this force is incarnate in all men and women, and needs only to be invoked to free the spirit from the debris of the old Aeon, and direct the blind force of Horus into constructive channels of understanding and love. (*The Book of Babalon*, typescript)

The text then goes on to describe the actual ceremonies that Hubbard and Parsons performed together from 4 January to 15 January 1946. As Crowley and the poet Victor B. Neuburg had done in the Algerian desert of 1909 (see Owen 2012), Parsons and Hubbard used the Enochian system of magic developed by the Elizabethan magicians Dr. John Dee and Edward Kelly (Crowley, Neuburg, and Desti 1998). It was no coincidence that Parsons chose to use the Enochian system, since it was through it that many key spiritual doctrines of Thelema, including those of the goddess Babalon, had been revealed to Crowley. But whereas Crowley and Neuburg explored the Aethyrs or spiritual levels, Parsons and Hubbard limited their use of the Enochian system to its Third Key or Call (an invocation of the element Air, the so-called Air Tablet). On the first day they prepared and consecrated an "Air Dagger" which "served as the special talisman of the operation," together with an Enochian Air Tablet on virgin parchment and a parchment talisman. The ritual itself consisted of eleven parts:

> (a) Invoking Pentagram of Air, (b) Invocation of Bornless One, (c) Conjuration of Air, (d) Consecration of Air Dagger, (e) Key Call of third

> Aire, (f) Invocation of God and King of Aire, (g) Invocation of Six Seniors, (h) Invocation of (RZLA) by and (EXARP), to visible appearance, (i) Invocation of wand with material basis on talisman, (j) Invocation with dagger, (k) License to depart, purification, and banishing.[10]

Parsons and Hubbard would have found the sources for these eleven rites in the published works of Crowley, and the combination of these rites would not have seemed unconventional or unorthodox to other members of the OTO. In fact, the rituals carried out by Parsons and Hubbard were in line with the Enochian tradition and ceremonial magic. The procedure was followed for eleven days, from 4–15 January, and the following results were noted in the record:

> *January 5*. A strong windstorm began suddenly about the middle of the first invocation.
> *Jan. 6*. Invoked as before. Windstorm continued intermittently all day and night.
> *Jan. 7*. Invoked twice. Wind subsided. Used Prokofief [sic] Violin Concerto No. 2 as musical background.
> *Jan. 8*. Invoked twice, using blood.
> *Jan. 9*. Invoked twice, replenishing material basis.
> *Jan. 10*. Invoked twice. I retired about 11 PM, and was awakened at 12 PM by nine strong, rapid knocks. A table lamp at the opposite corner of the room was thrown violently to the floor and broken. There was no window in this corner, and no wind was blowing at the time. (Note. I have little experience with phenomena of this sort. Magically speaking, it usually represents "breaks" in operation there should be no phenomena but the willed result.)
> *Jan. 11*. Invoked twice, using blood.
> *Jan. 12*. Invoked twice, A heavy windstorm.
> *Jan. 13*. Invoked twice, Windstorm continued.
> *Jan. 14*. The light system of the house failed about 9 PM. Another magician who had been staying at the house and studying with me, was carrying a candle across the kitchen when he was struck strongly on the right shoulder, and the candle knocked out of his hand. He called us, and we observed a brownish yellow light about seven feet high in the kitchen.

10 Significantly, the sources that Parsons and Hubbard used for the Babalon Working are to be found in Crowley's published works. See especially *The Book of the Goetia of Solomon the King* [Preliminary Invocation] (1904); "Liber O vel Manus et Sagittae" (1909); "Liber A vel Armorum" (1910); and "Liber Chanokh" (1912).

> I banished [it] with a magical sword, and it disappeared. His right arm was paralyzed for the rest of the night.
>
> *Jan. 15*. Invoked twice. At this time the Scribe [L. Ron Hubbard] developed some sort of astral vision, describing in detail an old enemy of mine of whom he had never heard, and later the guardian forms of Isis and the Archangel Michael. Later, in my room, I heard the raps again, and a buzzing, metallic voice crying "let me go free." I felt a great pressure and tension in the house that night, which was also noticed by the other occupants. There were no other phenomena. (*The Book of Babalon*, typescript)

According to Parsons, it took four days for the result to manifest:

> The feeling of tension and unease continued for four days. Then, on January 18, at sunset, while the Scribe [L. Ron Hubbard] and I were in the Mojave Desert, the feeling of tension suddenly snapped. I turned to him and said, "it is done," in absolute certainty that the operation was accomplished. I returned home, and found a young woman answering the requirements waiting for me. She is describable as an air of fire type with bronze red hair, fiery and subtle, determined and obstinate, sincere and perverse, with extraordinary personality, talent, and intelligence. (*The Book of Babalon*, typescript)

The woman that appeared at Parson's home was Marjorie Elizabeth Cameron (1922–1995), a former member of Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), which was part of the U.S. Navy.[11] Cameron had actually been at the house on South Orange Grove Avenue a short period before, but had not spoken with Parsons at that time. This time, however, they immediately fell in love and spent the next five weeks together in bed, from 19 January to 27 February. Cameron only later came to realize that the sexual intercourse that they engaged in during that period was actually a long series of sexual magic practices during which Parsons constantly invoked Babalon. Or, to quote from *The Book of Babalon*, "During the period of January 19 to February 27, I invoked the Goddess BABALON with the aid of my magical partner, as was proper to one of my grade."[12] In the midst of his sexual invocations of Babalon, on 2 February, Parsons found the time to write to Crowley, but instead of revealing the nature of his magical workings, he informed Crowley of how L. Ron Hubbard had defended him from an astral attack by his old mentor, W. T. Smith:

11 On Marjorie Cameron, see Kansa 2011.

12 The "grade" that Parsons refers to is the Ninth degree of the OTO, in which sexual magic was taught.

> Smith has called twice, whining, threatening and claiming furniture here. The next night Ron [Hubbard], who has never seen Smith, described him behind me, clad in a black robe and having an evil, pasty face. He attacked this figure and pinned it to the door with four throwing knives, with which he is expert. (John W. Parsons to Aleister Crowley, 2 February 1946)

Three weeks later, on 22 February, Parsons again wrote to Crowley, and this time he mentioned that he has found his elemental (Cameron):

> One thing I seem to have my Elemental. She turned up one night after the conclusion of the operation and has been with me since, though she goes back to New York next week. She has red hair and slant green eyes as specified. (John W. Parsons to Aleister Crowley, 22 February 1946)

On 28 February Cameron left for the East Coast and with Hubbard also on the East Coast, Parsons went out alone to the Mojave Desert where he once again invoked Babalon. According to Parsons, "the presence of the Goddess came upon me, and I was commanded to write the following." What he wrote was *Liber 49*, or *The Book of Babalon* in the strict sense. This short text consists of seventy-seven verses (however, verses 5–8 are lost), that in style and content resemble Crowley's revealed text, *The Book of the Law*. In fact, *Liber 49* is presented as the fourth chapter of *The Book of the Law*, and thus as both a continuation and completion of Crowley's revelation in 1904. The text appears to speak directly to Parsons in the first thirty-three verses, which give instructions on how to invoke Babalon. Significantly, Parsons is instructed to seek her in the "Seventh Aire," but due to Parsons' confused use of terminology it is unclear how he interpreted this from a practical point of view. Verses 34–46 seem to be directed to a woman who, as Babalon's daughter, is a incarnation of Babalon — "In My Name shall she have all power, and all men and excellent things, and kings and captains and the secret ones at her command" — whereas the remaining verses again seem to be directed to Parsons, in which Babalon gives instructions on how she should be worshipped. The text ends with the words: "Get my star upon your banners and go forward in joy and victory. None shall deny you, and none shall stand before you, because of the Sword of my Brother. Invoke me, call me in your convocations and rituals, call upon me in your loves and battles in my name BABALON, wherein is all power given!"

As far as can be ascertained, Parsons never sent a copy of his revelation to Crowley, nor did he mention the fact that he had received a fourth chapter of *The Book of the Law*.

The third and final part of the Babalon Working took place over three nights, from 2 March to 4 March, with L. Ron Hubbard acting as Scribe and

Parsons as High Priest. According to the record of the events it was Hubbard who instigated the rites upon his return to California when he claimed that he had had a vision of "a savage and beautiful woman riding naked on a great cat-like beast," and that it was urgent to receive a message or communication from the woman. At Hubbard's suggestion they played Rachmaninoff's "Isle of the Dead" as background music, and at about 8 P.M., Hubbard began to dictate a message, which Parsons wrote down:

> [L. Ron Hubbard]: The Angel of TARO. A three day retirement to greet her. Purify thyself. The symbol is seven by three. It is BABALON. Keep secret. The communications are sacred. These are the preparations. Green gold cloth, food for the Beast upon a hidden platter, back of the altar. Disclose only when the doors are bolted. Transgression is death. Back of the main altar. Prepare instantly. Light the first flame at 10 PM, March 2, 1946. The year of BABALON is 4063. Beware of the use of profane rituals. She is the flame of life, power of darkness, she destroys with a glance, she may take thy soul. She feeds upon the death of men. Beautiful — Horrible. (*The Book of Babalon*, typescript)

Hubbard continued by instructing Parsons in how the rituals should be performed and in the nature of the work that they were supposed to carry out. With these instructions as the basis for their continued magical work, Parsons made six invocations (taken from Crowley's published works),[13] and at the end of the first night the message that Hubbard had spoken of was received through the answers to three questions posed by Parsons:

1. How can I communicate directly with BABALON, hear her, see her, feel her, be sure that I am working aright?
   Answer. "At the altar in meditation, as you know now. Also, invoke me carnally with all your passion. Thus will you feel my desire and increase my substance."
2. How can I serve best?
   Answer. "Follow instructions exactly and in detail. Avoid loose interruptions. Be diligent. Do not hesitate or question, act. All depends on your time."
3. How can I be certain of the vehicle?

13 More specifically, selections from Crowley's "The Vision and the Voice," "The Gnostic Mass," and *Tannhäuser* — the latter being a volume of poetry first published in 1902.

> Answer. "Do not trouble yourself with this. It does not concern you. I will provide the vehicle, I will show you a sign, and signs. It is the now which concerns us. Keep your faith, think not overmuch." (*The Book of Babalon*, typescript)

The answers presumably came from Hubbard, acting as the mouthpiece of Babalon. Hubbard continued to dictate messages from Babalon during the following two nights, giving more detailed instructions on how to incarnate Babalon. The working ends with a poem that Parsons was supposed to use in worship when Babalon appears, a poem that culminates with the following words:

> Her mouth is red and her breasts are fair and her loins are full of fire, and her lust is strong as a man is strong in the heart of her desire, and her whoredom is holy as virtue is foul beneath the holy sky, and her kisses will wanton the world away in passion that shall not die. Ye shall laugh and love and follow her dance when the wrath of God is gone and dream no more of hell and hate in the Birth of BABALON. (*The Book of Babalon*, typescript)

Two days later, on 6 March, Parsons wrote to Crowley about the recent events:

> I can hardly tell you or know now much to write. I am under the command of extreme secrecy. I have had the most important — devastating — experience of my life between Feb. 2 and Mar. 4. I believe it was the result of the 9th [degree, i.e., sexual magic] working with the girl [i.e., Cameron] who answered my elemental summons. I have been in direct touch with One who is most Holy and Beautiful mentioned in *The Book of the Law*. I cannot write the name at present. First instructions were received through Ron [Hubbard] — the Seer. I have followed them to the letter. There was a desire for incarnation. I was the agency chosen to assist the birth which is now accomplished. I do not yet know the vehicle but it will come to me bringing a secret sign I know. Forgetfulness was the price. I am to act as instructor, guardian, guide for 9 months. Then it will be loosed on the world. That is all I can say now. There must be extreme secrecy. I cannot tell you the depth of reality, the poignancy, terror and beauty I have known. Now I am back in the world, weak with reaction. But the knowledge remains. I have found my will. It is to serve and serve I shall. All I am or will is pledged . . . It is not a question of keeping anything from you, it is a question of not dwelling or thinking unduly on the

> matter until the time is right. Premature discussion or revelation would cause an abortion. A manuscript [*The Book of Babalon*] is prepared which will be released to the proper persons at the right time. I must ask you to trust me.
>
> Your work has made this possible: this will crown your work with success. All the tests are right. There is no danger, save in weakness or pride. My faith is strong. I am humble before the splendor and beauty I have known and the task is before me. I ask your blessing. (John W. Parsons to Aleister Crowley, 6 March 1946)

Crowley found the letter confusing, and did not give Parsons his blessing. He voiced his concern in a letter to Grady McMurty, dated 14 March, who by then had become Crowley's closest student in California:[14] "I do not really know what is happening with Jack [Parsons]. He wrote me the sort of letter that would have been useful if I had only left him a fortnight before; he always expects me to know what the actual position is down there without any sort of information whatever. It makes it very difficult to answer him" (Aleister Crowley to Grady McMurty, 14 March 1946). By the end of the month Crowley criticized Parsons directly for overestimating his experiences:

> I am particularly interested in what you have written to me about the Elemental [Cameron], because for some little while past I have been endeavouring to intervene personally in this matter on your behalf. I would however have you recall Lévi's aphorism "the love of the Magus for such beings is insensate and may destroy him." It seems to me that there

14 Six weeks earlier, on 25 January 1946, Grady McMurty had sent Crowley a Sovereign Grand Inspector General report "concerning the personnel and activities of the Order in Southern California." The report, written at the height of the Babalon Working, gives an impression of how the members of the Agape Lodge regarded their lodge master, Parsons. McMurty wrote that "Jack is a man of integrity and aspiration, all he lacks is an experienced instructor. He is easily the outstanding personality of the whole group." The report mentions Hubbard by name twice: "Betty [Sara E. Northrup] has taken up with a friend of Jack's by the name of Ron Hubbard. As a consequence she and Jack have parted as 'friends' and Jack is left free . . . One evening while I was at 1003 Jack and Hubbard decided to do some fencing — without masks. The light was very poor and they kept tangling with the rugs but, as both men know something of the sport, it was not exactly mortal combat. When Betty, however, took a foil against Hubbard I thought that someone was going to be killed. They finally desisted after she had been rapped smartly across the nose." Grady McMurty, "Sovereign Grand Inspector General Report, 25 January 1946." Typescript and manuscript, OTO Archives.

> is a danger of your sensitiveness upsetting your balance. Any experience that comes your way you have a tendency to over-estimate.
>
> The first fine careless rapture wears off in a month or so, and some other experience comes along and carries you off on its back. Meanwhile you have neglected and bewildered those who are dependent on you, either from above or from below. I will ask you to bear in mind that you have one fulcrum for all your levers, and that is your original oath to devote yourself to raising mankind. All experience, all efforts, must be referred to this; as long as it remains unshaken you cannot go far wrong, for by its own stability it will bring you back from any tendency to excess. At the same time, you being sensitive as you are, it behooves you to be more on your guard than would be the case with the majority of people. (Aleister Crowley to John W. Parsons, 27 March 1946)

Crowley quickly lost faith in Parsons, and, on 19 April 1946, he wrote to his friend and future successor, Karl Germer: "Apparently he [Parsons] or Ron [Hubbard] or somebody is producing a Moonchild. I get fairly frantic when I contemplate the idiocy of these goats." On 19 May he wrote to Parsons, "You have me completely puzzled by your remarks about the elemental — the danger of discussing or copying anything. I thought I had the most morbid imagination, as good as any man's. But it seems I have not. I cannot form the slightest idea of whom you can possibly mean." By then Crowley had also learned that Parsons, Hubbard, and Betty in January had formed a partnership called Allied Enterprises, with the object of purchasing yachts on the East Coast, sailing them to California, and selling them for a profit. Parsons invested $20,970.80, a considerable sum, while Hubbard only contributed $1,183.91 — Crowley concluded that Hubbard was a confidence trickster: "Suspect Ron [Hubbard] playing confidence trick — Jack Parsons weak fool" (Aleister Crowley to Karl Germer, 22 May 1946). Crowley's suspicion turned out to be well-founded, and Parsons and Hubbard finally ended their friendship when Parsons, realizing that he was being fooled, raced after Hubbard and Betty to Miami where he had to invoke Bartzabel in order to prevent them from fleeing on a yacht.[15] Or so he reported to Crowley:

> Here I am in Miami pursuing the children of my folly [L. Ron Hubbard and Sara Northrup]. I have them well tied up; they cannot move without going to jail. However I am afraid that most of the money has already been dissipated. I will be lucky to salvage 3,000–5,000 dollars. In the interim

15 Parsons' likely source for the ritual was Crowley's "An Evocation of Bartzabel, the Spirit of Mars," published in *The Equinox* (1913).

> I am flat broke counting on my fare 2,000 miles from home — c'est la vie. An interesting incident — Hubbard attempted to escape me by sailing at 5 p.m. and I performed a full invocation to Bartzabel within the circle at 8 p.m. At the same time, as far as I can check, his ship was struck by a sudden squall off the coast, which ripped off his sails and forced him back to port, where I took the boat in custody. I am not greatly impressed, but it is interesting. (John W. Parsons to Aleister Crowley, 26 July 1946)

Having lost faith in Parsons, a few months later Crowley had him removed as lodge master of Agape Lodge. He instead appointed Roy Leffingwell as the new head of the lodge, after which Parsons resigned from the OTO. Commenting on Parsons and Hubbard in a letter to Agape Lodge member Louis T. Culling, Crowley wrote: "About J. W. P. — all that I can say is that I am very sorry — I feel sure that he had fine ideas, but he was led astray firstly by Smith, then he was robbed of his last penny by a confidence man named Hubbard" (Aleister Crowley to Louis T. Culling, 28 October 1946). Crowley's final word on the matter was even more bitter: "I have no further interest in Jack and his adventures; he is just a weak-minded fool, and must go to the devil in his own way. Requiescat in pace" (Aleister Crowley to Louis T. Culling, 17 December 1946).

Parsons married his elemental, Marjorie Cameron, on 19 October 1946, and he would later come to believe that Babalon had incarnated in Cameron and that he had thus been mistaken in the earlier belief that Cameron would be the mother of an incarnation of Babalon. After Parsons' death on 17 June 1952, Cameron would identify herself with Babalon for the rest of her life. Hubbard, in his turn, married Sara Northrup in 1946, and she became intimately involved with Hubbard's work until they divorced in 1951. Hubbard never spoke publicly about Parsons or his involvement in the Babalon Working.

Enochian Magic and Western Esotericism

What are we to make of Hubbard's involvement with the Babalon Working? In order to assess and understand the rituals that Hubbard and Parsons engaged in for the first three months of 1946, it is useful to approach the topic from the study of Western esotericism. The practice of magic and other forms of twentieth-century occultism is increasingly being understood by Western esotericism scholars *not* as a "flight from reason," i.e., as a reaction against modernity and secularization which embraced irrationality and superstition — as older forms of scholarship claimed (e.g., Webb 1971). On the contrary, occultism is often seen as part of modernity, or even as the harbinger of modernity (see, for instance, Pasi 2009). Rationality, logic, and scientism are thus often intimately

connected with esoteric discourses on magic and other similar currents and practices. Aleister Crowley's work is a case in point, where many of the key components of modernity (such as the prioritization of individualism, rejection of tradition, faith in scientific and technological progress, and the belief in human perfectibility), are combined with esoteric discourses. To Jack Parsons, there was no apparent conflict between his roles as a leading rocket fuel scientist and lodge master of a secret society that practiced magic. The alternative milieu in California during the late 1930s and 1940s, to which both Parsons and Hubbard belonged, was characterized by a mixture of science fiction literature, occultist discourses, jazz music, and explorations of sexuality and mind-altering drugs. Or, if we narrow in on the spiritual parts of the alternative culture, we can for analytical purposes make use of Christopher Partridge's concept of "occulture" (2005). The occult was part of the popular culture in California: magic was in the air.

Still, the particular form of magic that Hubbard and Parsons performed was very specific in nature — Enochian Magic, which had its own tradition, rules, central texts, and key discourses (Asprem 2012). It is obvious that Parsons was the leading person in the work and that Hubbard acted as his assistant, although Hubbard would quickly learn the peculiar terminology associated with Enochian and Crowleyan magic, as evidenced by the "communications" that Hubbard delivered during the third part of the Babalon Working. It was through his involvement with the OTO that Parsons learned to perform ceremonial magic, although it seems unlikely that he was actually trained by the older members in the performance of Enochian magic (there is nothing in the surviving correspondence that indicates that W. T. Smith or any of the other members trained Parsons in this particular form of magic). Instead, Parsons studied Crowley's published writings on the subject, especially "Liber Chanock," published in *The Equinox* (1912). In this text Crowley gave the "Calls" or invocations that the practitioner is supposed to use when exploring the thirty Aethyrs or astral levels of the Enochian system. Hubbard and Parsons differed significantly, however, from how previous magicians such as Crowley and John Dee had used the system in that the Babalon Working's ultimate goal was to incarnate the Thelemic goddess Babalon into a human being. Parsons and Hubbard's Enochian magic was thus not limited to accessing *gnosis* or some sort of revealed knowledge, but was cosmic in scope in the sense that they sought to prevent a disaster from happening. Babalon would act as a counterforce to the destructive force that Parsons believed had been unleashed with the reception of *The Book of the Law* in 1904.

Scholars of esotericism have argued that modern Western magic differs from medieval and early modern forms of magic due to the impact of a disenchanted worldview. More specifically, twentieth-century forms of magic

are more often than not characterized by "psychologization" through which entities such as demons and angels are interpreted as psychological aspects or principles, rather than as objective entities existing outside of the human mind. The "psychologization of magic" thesis, which is most clearly postulated by Wouter J. Hanegraaff, thus points to a profound transformation of the nature of Western magic, dominated by discourses on rationality, positivism, and science (Hanegraaff 2005). A case in point would be twentieth-century interpretations of Enochian magic — such as Crowley's exploration of the Aethyrs in 1900 and 1909 — that stand in sharp contrast to the enchanted understanding of the Enochian system as postulated by John Dee. In light of the dominant disenchanted twentieth-century understanding of magic, the Babalon Working stands out as a remarkable example of what can only be described as a premodern, enchanted worldview. For Parsons and Hubbard, the stated object of the Babalon Working was not merely to explore the Enochian Aethyrs as initiatory astral planes from a psychological perspective but, on the contrary, to incarnate a spiritual entity, Babalon, in human form. It is ironic that despite Crowley's dismissal of such forms of magic, he had himself argued for such a possibility when outmaneuvering W. T. Smith by claiming that Smith was the incarnation of an unknown god. Furthermore, Crowley's habit of identifying his female lovers and magical partners with Babalon in ways that often went beyond the merely symbolical, coupled with the theme of the incarnation of a "moonchild" into human form that featured prominently in his novel *Moonchild* (1929), were likely sources of inspiration for Parsons' and Hubbard's Babalon Working. Parsons' and Hubbard's magical activities can thus be seen as both a continuation of contemporary forms of magic (especially as found in Crowley's published works) and as an innovation in the sense that they interpreted magic from the perspective of an enchanted worldview.

The original Enochian workings of Dee and Kelly in the sixteenth century came to an end when Kelly proclaimed that the angels instructed them to swap wives. The irony was not lost on Parsons, who, in a letter to Cameron four years after the Babalon Working, concluded:

> I have the text of Dee's skrying in the 7th Aire, as he said "so terrified me that, beseeching God to have mercy upon me, I finally answer that I will from this day forward meddle no more herein." The voice, speaking from Kelly, resulted in a sinister dissociation of Kelly's personality. The parallel with my own working with Ron [Hubbard] is appalling. After this Kelly robbed Dee, absconded with his wife, and developed a criminal confidence career.

> In view of the fact that this MSS. was unknown to Hubbard and I [sic], the parallelism is really extraordinary. (John W. Parsons to Marjorie Cameron, 25 January 1950)

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